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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
TAGS: EAIR, SNAR, CO  
SUBJECT: U.S./COLOMBIAN MEETING ON AIR CARGO SECURITY,  
MAY 7

1. SUMMARY: U.S. AND COLOMBIAN OFFICIALS MET ON MAY 7 TO DISCUSS COLOMBIAN CONCERNS STEMMING FROM THE SEIZURE OF AN AVIANCA AIRCRAFT IN FEBRUARY. GOC CHAIRMAN GUILLERMO PENAGOS FORCEFULLY PRESENTED THE GOC VIEW THAT AVIANCA, WITH ITS INSTITUTIONAL FUNCTION IN FOREIGN TRADE, SHOULD NOT BE PUT AT RISK BECAUSE OF SPECIFIC LAW ENFORCEMENT OBJECTIVES. HE EMPHASIZED THE GOC'S FIRM COMMITMENT TO THE SUPPRESSION OF DRUG TRAFFICKING, BUT ARGUED THAT AVIANCA, AS A COMMON CARRIER OF PASSENGERS AND CARGO, SHOULD NOT BE HELD RESPONSIBLE AS A CORPORATE ENTITY FOR THE DRUG TRAFFICKING PERPETRATED BY INDIVIDUAL PASSENGERS OR SHIPPERS. THE U.S. WELCOMED THE GOC'S COMMITMENT TO SUPPRESS ILLICIT DRUG TRADE, BUT MAINTAINED THAT NO ELEMENT IN THE SYSTEM COULD BE EXEMPTED CATEGORICALLY FROM RESPONSIBILITY FOR ILLEGAL ACTS. BOTH SIDES AGREED ON THE NEED FOR GREATER COORDINATION AND GENERAL MANAGEMENT OF ACTIVITIES DESIGNED TO COMBAT ILLICIT DRUG TRADE. THE U.S. EXPRESSED WILLINGNESS, AND OUTLINED PLANS BY CUSTOMS, TO ASSIST AVIANCA AND THE GOC TO IMPROVE

SECURITY MEASURES FOR COLOMBIAN-ORIGIN CARGO. DESPITE THE INTENSITY WHICH PENAGOS OCCASIONALLY SHOWED IN HIS PRESENTATION, THE TONE OF THE MEETING WAS CORDIAL AND COOPERATIVE. END SUMMARY.

2. AT THE INSTANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF COLOMBIA(GOC), U.S. AND COLOMBIAN OFFICIALS AND AIRLINE REPRESENTATIVES MET IN WASHINGTON ON MAY 7 TO DISCUSS AIR CARGO SECURITY CONCERNS STEMMING FROM THE SEIZURE IN FEBRUARY OF AN AVIANCA AIRCRAFT CARRYING OVER 2000 POUNDS OF COCAINE. DGCA PENAGOS, CHAIRMAN OF THE GOC DELEGATION, EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE WHICH THE GOC PLACES ON THE CONTINUED OPERATION AND VIABILITY OF AVIANCA, THE VITAL ROLE OF THE AIRLINE IN FACILITATING TRADE BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND THE U.S., AND THE DEADLY THREAT THAT SEIZURE OF AVIANCA AIRCRAFT OR HEAVY FINES POSED TO THE LIFE OF THE AIRLINE. PENAGOS ASSURED THE U.S. SIDE OF THE GOC'S COMMITMENT TO COOPERATE FULLY WITH THE U.S. IN SUPPRESSION OF ILLEGAL DRUG TRADE, BUT ASSERTED THAT AVIANCA, AS A COMMON CARRIER OF PASSENGERS AND CARGO, SHOULD NOT BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DRUG TRAFFIC PERPETRATED BY INDIVIDUAL SHIPPERS OR PASSENGERS DESPITE THE EXTENSIVE EFFORTS OF AVIANCA AND GOC OFFICIALS TO STOP THEM. HE SOUGHT

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ASSURANCES THAT U.S. AUTHORITIES WOULD BE MORE CONSIDER-  
ATE OF AVIANCA.

3. THE U.S. SIDE ACKNOWLEDGED THE CLOSE COOPERATION WHICH HAS CHARACTERIZED EFFORTS BY THE USG AND GOC IN THE SUPPRESSION OF DRUG TRAFFICKING AND THANKED THE GOC FOR ITS COMMITMENT IN THIS REGARD. WE STRESSED THAT THERE WAS COMPLETE AGREEMENT ON GOALS. AT ISSUE WAS HOW TO IMPLEMENT THEM. UNDER DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS OF LAW, AUTHORITIES MUST FIX RESPONSIBILITY AS EXACTLY AS POSSIBLE. THEREFORE, AS USG CHAIRMAN VONDEN STEINEN (EB/OA/AVP) EMPHASIZED, NO PARTICIPANT IN THE SYSTEM, SUCH AS AN AIRLINE, COULD BE EXEMPTED AS A CATEGORY. NEITHER COULD IT BE MADE A SCAPEGOAT. ALL PARTIES MUST BE RESPONSIBLE. AN AIRLINE LIKE AVIANCA, WITH ITS HISTORIC POSITION IN INTER-AMERICAN AVIATION AND IN LIGHT OF THE VITAL ROLE IT PLAYS IN ESSENTIAL COMMERCE, MUST ASSUME SERIOUS RESPONSIBILITY.

4. THE U.S. SIDE STRESSED ITS WILLINGNESS TO ASSIST AVIANCA AND THE GOC IN THEIR EFFORTS TO ENHANCE SECURITY MEASURES FOR COLOMBIAN-ORIGIN AIR CARGO. THE U.S. CHAIRMAN OUTLINED PLANS FOR A MEETING ON AIR CARGO SECURITY BETWEEN U.S. CUSTOMS OFFICIALS AND AVIANCA OFFICIALS IN MIAMI ON MAY 16. HE ALSO REFERRED TO CUSTOMS' READINESS TO SEND OFFICIALS TO BOGOTA TO ASSIST GOC AND AVIANCA OFFICIALS. HE OFFERED TO HELP FACILITATE IMPROVED AIRPORT SECURITY, SUGGESTING (WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE FAA SECURITY REPRESENTATIVE KROHN) INTENSIFIED INTER-AIRLINE SECURITY COOPERATION.

5. U.S. AND COLOMBIAN OFFICIALS AGREED THAT THE SCOPE AND THE COMPLEXITY OF THE DRUG TRAFFICKING PROBLEM INTERNATIONALLY REQUIRES THE CLOSEST POSSIBLE COORDINATION OF EFFORTS BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS, AND WITHIN INDIVIDUAL GOVERNMENTS AMONG THE VARIOUS AGENCIES INVOLVED IN THE SUPPRESSION OF THE ILLICIT DRUG TRADE. IT WAS AGREED IN PRINCIPLE TO ENCOURAGE GREATER COORDINATION OF DRUG SUPPRESSION ACTIVITIES WITHIN OUR RESPECTIVE GOVERNMENTS AND BETWEEN THE U.S. AND COLOMBIA. GOC CHAIRMAN PENAGOS STRESSED THE NEED FOR INTENSIFIED COOPERATION AT ALL LEVELS AND MADE A SPECIAL APPEAL FOR STRONGER GENERAL MANAGEMENT. BOTH SIDES AGREED TO EXPLORE OTHER OPPORTUNITIES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR IMPROVING OVERALL COORDINATION OF U.S./COLOMBIAN EFFORTS IN THE SUPPRESSION OF DRUG TRADE, AND TO TRANSMIT SUGGESTIONS OF THIS TYPE THROUGH THE U.S. EMBASSY IN BOGOTA.

6. COMMENT: THE MEETING GAVE PENAGOS THE OPPORTUNITY TO DELIVER HIS MESSAGE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF AVIANCA TO THE GOC AND THE COLOMBIAN ECONOMY. PENAGOS' PRESENTATION WAS FORCEFUL, AND AT TIMES ANIMATED, BUT REMAINED IN HARMONY WITH THE CORDIAL AND COOPERATIVE TONE OF THE MEETING. END COMMENT.

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END OF MESSAGE

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